

Book Reviews

Asia

Colonialism and the Hong Kong mentality

By DAVID FAURE

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The University of Hong Kong, 2003. Pp. 240. Notes, Bibliography, Index.

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David Faure's *Colonialism and the Hong Kong mentality* concerns the timely subject of governing Hong Kong. The book will interest students of Southeast Asian history because they will be able to learn more about the legacies of imperialism. The text is divided into two parts: the first contains a series of essays on the political development of Hong Kong after the Second World War, while the second half is composed of nearly 140 pages of colonial documents.

Faure's essays, which are based upon seminars delivered at Hong Kong University, are shaped around the premise that colonial practices left Hong Kong ill-equipped for self-governance. Colonialism inhibited its population from a 'discussion of first principles' (p. 85), causing them to become apolitical because they came to understand public developments as inevitable and therefore to view policy-making with 'resignation'. Faure believes that this ideology, which blindly accepts the 'imposition of rules without consultation' (p. 86), marks Hong Kong's enduring colonial mentality. These essays are based upon both the archival materials in the second part of the book and the author's memories of growing up in Hong Kong. Interesting as they may be, however, these chapters come across as knowing but impressionistic.

That said, the archival materials which Faure makes available are useful and interesting. His selection is fascinating because there is an abundance of material which goes well beyond the political focus of the first section. These documents reveal a lot not only about the pessimism of the British, but also about living conditions, educational policy, public health, labour relations (of which one colonial observed that 'there are none') (p. 144) and the permanent shadow which the rising China cast over the colony. Unfortunately, these documents also illustrate that the story which Faure is trying to hint at is of a complexity to which the first section of the book hardly does justice.

Nonetheless, *Colonialism and the Hong Kong Mentality* is useful for those interested in the second half of the twentieth century because it makes vivid the difficult transition inherent in any move away from colonial rule.

STEPHEN L. KECK

National University of Singapore

Southeast Asia

Earthenware in Southeast Asia

Edited by JOHN MIKSIC

Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003. Pp. xxiii, 370. Maps, Figures, Bibliography, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404220276

This book is a major contribution to the fields of Southeast Asian archaeology and art history since it brings together more than a score of articles discussing the different aspects of earthenware research. John Miksic should be congratulated for overseeing this project. The original impetus occurred when he saw the need for an avenue to discuss the earthenwares being found in the region. As he states in the introduction, 'In most comparable regions of the world, pottery has been subjected to sustained attack by generations of scholars who . . . have constructed general frameworks which enable them to use potsherds . . . to understand cultural developments and linkages both within the region, and with other areas. Southeast Asia still lacks such framework' (p. xix).

Among the contributors is Wilhelm Solheim, who provides an overview of the studies that have been conducted on island and mainland Southeast Asia. He was one of the earliest researchers on the topic in the region, whose pioneering works showed that Southeast Asia is no backwater. Instead, it has a very rich cultural past comparable to Europe and the Americas. Through his studies, Solheim pointed out similarities in form, design and function of earthenware, thus establishing connections and interactions amongst the peoples of Southeast Asia and between them and their neighbours outside the region.

Almost all the countries of the region are represented in *Earthenware in Southeast Asia* except for Brunei, with Indonesia and the Philippines receiving particular attention. The topics in the country-specific research are very detailed, allowing for almost all aspects of earthenware study to be included. Geographical distribution of pottery sites, production, consumption and function, analysis of stylistic design, determination of similarities and differences, statistical analysis, C-14 dates, regional influences and settlement patterns are just some of the topics covered. In terms of time depth, both prehistoric and historic period earthenwares are included. While most of the contributors focus on a specific country, the research on the women potters is a notable undertaking as it acknowledges the makers and not just the product. More data about the potters could perhaps be included, however. Also notable is the research on present-day ground firing techniques, which Charlotte Reith explains as 'the most critical because it is at this time that the clay is transformed immutably' (p. 311).

Another major contribution is the inclusion of research conducted in Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar (Burma). While these countries have continued to conduct excavations amidst strife, their publications are difficult to find since most are only published locally and usually not in English. Reading the results of the research on Cambodia, for example, allows for a better 'understanding of the social, political, economic and ritual milieus of Cambodia's past' (p. 210) and the establishment of links between sites in present-day Cambodia and Vietnam between 500 BC and AD 500 (p. 229), and their connection with the other Southeast Asian countries. An example of this would be Solheim's Sa Huynh-Kalanay pottery complex involving Vietnam and the Philippines.

Even the inclusion of research on the potters and pottery of the Assam Region is an acknowledgement of the extent of Southeast Asian influence in the western reaches of mainland Southeast Asia.

The research results found in this book leave the reader with a lot to think about. Much remains to be done in regard to the study of earthenwares in Southeast Asia. Further interaction among and between researchers should be done with research results made easily accessible. How is this to be done? There is a 'need for a research group or a kind of centre for pottery studies where appropriate methodologies of acquisition, recording, analyzing, and conserving artifacts [may be carried out]. Corollary to this is the production of a database for comparing and integrating our endeavors to reconstruct the past' (p. 145). The book as a whole is a delight for both serious researchers and pottery enthusiasts alike, and is the first step in the development of our knowledge of the subject in Southeast Asia.

MARY JANE LOUISE A. BOLUNIA
National Museum of the Philippines

Strange parallels: Southeast Asia in global context, c. 800–1830. Volume 1: Integration on the mainland

By VICTOR LIEBERMAN

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Pp. xxiii, 484. Maps, Figures, Notes, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404230272

This is the most important book on pre – and early modern Southeast Asian history since Anthony Reid's two volumes on the Age of Commerce (Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce: The lands below the winds* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988] and *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce: Expansion and crisis* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993]). The period it covers and its scope are much more encompassing than any other survey presently available. The volume analyses the long-term process of political and cultural consolidation that took place in the three main sectors of continental Southeast Asia (present-day Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam). The next volume is to take up an explicit comparison with other parts of Eurasia – France, Russia, China and Japan – which went through a similar historical process, which, it is argued, differed fundamentally from that of South Asia or insular Southeast Asia. In this way, mainland Southeast Asian history is becoming part of world history, in which there is less room for approaches which regulate certain world regions to an imagined periphery or pursue an isolationist historiography of individual non-Western areas.

Lieberman has taken up the daunting task of writing a new meta-narrative on a thousand years of mainland Southeast Asian history, infusing more coherence and more sophisticated strings of explanation than have hitherto been produced by a historiography that has become more detailed and topically broader over the last few decades but at the same time highly fragmented. In this way he has set a new standard which will incite regional and local historians either to support or to refute his tenets. The basic premise of the monograph is that precolonial integration was based on four consecutive cycles of

political and cultural consolidation, which were roughly synchronic in the western, central and eastern mainland parts of Southeast Asia and which became stronger as time progressed. Whereas two cultural systems (Burman and Mon) co-existed in the Irrawaddy basin, three (Tai, Mon, Khmer) in the Chaophraya corridor, and three (Vietnamese, Cham and Khmer) in the eastern lowlands, by 1830 in each sector one dominant system had emerged. A multidimensional mode of explanation is used to underscore this basic premise, relying less on external factors like maritime trade and cultural transfer and stressing more an internal process based on a multifaceted coalescence among climatic, demographic, agricultural, administrative, military and cultural factors. In this way, Lieberman incorporates so-called third-wave theories of early modern state formation that are currently being pursued for European history, moving away from socio-economic and geopolitical explanations towards those in which state-building depends on regulatory and cultural-religious mechanisms. His approach also reminds us of current trends in world history, in which elements of transcontinental transfer – including flows of silver, crops, disease and the spread of weapons technology – are included.

The book is very systematic in its presentation and consists of four parts. First, the author presents his new thesis, discussing its content, its location within history-writing on Southeast Asia and the implications for the broad region of 'Eurasia'. The central, innovative claim is formulated on p. 73 in a straightforward manner: 'I adopt a different geographic and chronological perspective, a fresh set of thematical concerns, and a new explanatory dynamic.' Then, three chapters of similar length describe the developments in the western, central and eastern parts of the mainland within the context of the theory explained in the first part. These concentrate less on events and more – as in similar *longue durée* histories – on the specific quality of processes and underlying structures. Four administrative patterns are posited – from a so-called charter administration towards centralised Indic administration, with a Chinese-style structure as a somewhat separate system. This structural format allows the author to compare the three sections of mainland Southeast Asia and also to evaluate the degree to which the history of each section fits the model. The book ends with a very brief conclusion and outlook for the next volume.

A review like this one cannot dwell on the details of how the history of each part of mainland Southeast Asia is presented; this is a task which country historians will probably eagerly pick up. In fact, some possible reservations have already been singled out and responded to by Lieberman himself, in a pre-emptive move to counter possible doubts. His text is not only a critical revision of the existing historiography but also a discussion in itself and an invitation to the reader to get involved in the debate.

On a general level a number of systemic issues spring to mind that should be addressed if scholars of Southeast Asia are going to accept Lieberman's thesis as the new baseline for the history of this world region. First, there is the issue of the connection between chronology, content and comparison. It is argued that a rough time concurrence existed in the process of centralisation, which took place not only in the three lowland areas of mainland Southeast Asia but also in northwest Europe, eastern Europe and parts of Asia. Behind this idea is the assumption that a basic logic shaped Eurasian history which has yet to be exposed because of the separate focus of divided history books but which characterises the same structural process across both continents. Yet

chronological coincidence in itself does not prove similarity on the content side: processes of state formation or administrative centralisation took place everywhere but were not necessarily linear or cyclic or identical. This reservation is not meant to argue a return to the great divide between Western and non-Western history, which is fortunately in the process of being bridged, despite the continuing gap in the quality and quantity of the available data. Rather, my remark addresses the level of generalisation and the possibility of variation within world history.

A second issue is the basic assumption that mainland Southeast Asian history is linked to Eurasia rather than to insular Southeast Asian or South Asian history. This idea has its origin in Lieberman's critique of Reid's two-volume study, in which the overriding importance of maritime trade for the development of early modern Southeast Asia and the concept of a seventeenth-century crisis were stressed. (See Victor Lieberman, 'An Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia? Problems of regional coherence – a review article', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 54, 3 [1995]: 796–807.) Even if this is different for mainland Southeast Asia, however, the question remains whether the divisions within the mainland were less fundamental than those with the island world. Can we, for instance, really argue that the process of state formation in Majapahit or Mataram cannot be compared with that in parts of mainland Southeast Asia?

Finally, a possible reservation can be made that the need to observe unity fuels the argument in the part of the study focussed on mainland Southeast Asia itself. The perspective adopted in this study is basically centric, looking at the administrative and religious processes in the lowlands and their impact on the peripheries of the mainland. The question is whether this unity of history would not be broken if the perspective were reversed. There also seems to be a problem with bringing Vietnam into the fold of Burmese and Thai history, as a fourth, non-Indic administrative pattern is needed to accommodate the eastern mainland. The fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century Vietnam was unified under one dynasty despite continuous centrifugal tendencies is explained by the following remark: 'I suggest that this reflected a series of political and military accidents, reinforced by a shared political and cultural vocabulary and an assumption that Vietnamese-speaking districts constituted a more or less coherent field of political contestation (which was quite different from a unified polity)' (p. 344). This raises doubt about the similarity with the cycles of political integration on the rest of the mainland.

It is certain that this book will provoke debate among historians of Southeast Asia, world history experts and – hopefully, at least after the appearance of the second volume – among historians of the West. This should be seen as one strength of a highly successful, fundamental study which brings Southeast Asian history into the fold of global history, thereby breaking through much of its often introverted character. Also the nature of the historical processes and their underlying causality have been subjected to a basic reinterpretation which will revitalise the debate amongst historians and which opens the door to a new kind of Southeast Asian history.

VINCENT J. H. HOUBEN
Humboldt University, Berlin

Indonesia

Katalog naskah Merapi-Merbabu Perpustakaan Nasional Republik Indonesia

By KARTIKA SETYAWATI, I. KUNTARA WIRYAMARTANA and WILLEM VAN DER MOLEN
 Yogyakarta: Penerbitan Universitas Sanata Dharma; Leiden: Opleiding Talen
 en Culturen van Zuidoost-Asië en Oceanië Universiteit Leiden, 2002. Pp. 278.
 Bibliography, Appendices, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404240279

This book is a detailed guide to one of the many sub-collections in the large manuscript holdings of the National Library of Indonesia. Almost the entire book consists of catalogue entries describing each manuscript in the sub-collection. The *naskah Merapi-Merbabu* (Merapi-Merbabu manuscripts) were stored in a library near Mount Merbabu in Central Java and are thus believed to be originally from that area. The manuscripts were typically written on palm leaves in either Old Javanese or Arabic script in classical Javanese, Sanskrit, Arabic or a combination of the three. The collection described in this book has been preserved on microfilm and the originals have also been conserved and stored in the National Library of Indonesia.

In the introductory chapter of the book, the authors provide a brief but very informative historical background for the manuscript collection at the National Library of Indonesia as well as the Merbabu collection itself. They also give information on the organisation of the collection, the subjects of the manuscripts and an explanation of the languages in which they were written. The catalogue includes detailed information about the organisation of this catalogue and what a researcher can expect to find in each individual entry. Interpreting the detailed entries about the manuscripts can, however, be confusing due to the rather irregular and complicated numbering system; thus reading the introduction very thoroughly is a *must* prior to consulting the entries.

The ideal framework of an entry in the catalogue consists of 16 elements, but not all of them are used in each entry because of varying availability of information. The 16 elements are: sequence number, container number, case or clamp number, number of palm leaves used for one title, size of palm leaf, number of lines on each leaf, type of script, language, genre (prose, poem, drawing, etc.), physical condition of the palm leaves, place where the writing of a manuscript took place, year in which the writing was done, number according to earlier descriptions (i.e., identification number in older catalogues), title and type of text, contents, and beginning and last phrases.

The positive side of this book is its thoroughness: it provides every possible way of helping researchers identify each manuscript in the sub-collection. The microfilm list, with information about which reel contains which manuscript in which box, and the title index are both very useful. The fact that it is written in Indonesian automatically limits its use to those who can read the language, but any researcher who does not speak Indonesian and does not read classical Javanese or Arabic scripts would have little interest in using this book. From the standpoint of a public service academic librarian, this book will serve research libraries with extensive Southeast Asia collections well, but will be less useful for undergraduate libraries.

ROHAYATI PASENG BARNARD
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Clearing a space: Postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature

Edited by KEITH FOULCHER and TONY DAY

Leiden: KILTV, 2002. Pp. 381. Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404250275

Although modern Indonesian literature originated as a response to the Dutch colonial regime and later often butted heads with the post-colonial state, the use of *bahasa Indonesia* has tended to isolate it from mainstream post-colonial cultural studies. This book attempts to redress this deficiency by subjecting an extensive range of Indonesian writing to post-colonial reading strategies. Originating from a conference on 'Postcoloniality and the question of modern Indonesian literature' held at the University of Sydney in May 1998 – coincidentally just at the time of Suharto's forced resignation from the post-1965 New Order regime, which has been compared to the Dutch colonial state at the height of its power – the book directs itself to the scrutiny of identity and language issues concerning the cultural condition of postcoloniality. Seizing a metaphor from Kwame Anthony Appiah in his *In my father's house: What does it mean to be an African today* (London: Methuen, 1992), the editors state that the essays are intended to 'clear a space' for a critical approach that could be beneficial in creating new possibilities for Indonesian identity and literary expression as well as enabling future comparative research with literatures of other post-colonial societies. Many of the essays focus on literary appropriations of colonial discourses for the creation of hybrid cultures and identities, while others examine the relation of texts to colonial cultural logic, either in their duplication of the rationality of this authority or in the subversion of imperial power.

One would expect a project like this to offer macro or globalised readings of Indonesian texts which would relate the literary work in an interdisciplinary manner to local and transnational cultural and aesthetic trends and problems. One is prepared for broad strokes of the literary critical pen which would outline the cultural and social landscape of Indonesia. Much of this is plentifully forthcoming, but sometimes the discourse appears to have difficulty extricating itself from what the editors describe as the 'provincial Indonesian studies' context (p. 3), from which it seeks to differentiate itself.

Take, for instance, Marshall Clark's essay which studies the parodic reworkings of traditional *wayang* (shadow puppet theatre) renditions of the *Mahabharata* in contemporary Indonesian literature as a literary intersection of post-colonial and post-modern impulses. Clark offers a convincing narrative of the emergence of a body of 'wayang novels' from the late 1980s which opposed the authoritative main trunk or 'pakem' plots of the *Mahabharata* – as metaphor of Suharto's repressive regime – with the *carangan* or 'branch' plots comprising the escapades of a 'rakyat' of pro-democracy clown servants. Through micronarratives that questioned stable notions of native identity and ethics, this 'carangan-isation' worked at undermining the state's grand narratives of a developmentalist-oriented modernity and an official ideology of *Pancasila*.

Clark eventually draws us towards the interesting conclusion that the postmodern pastiche and lack of depth of these *wayang* novels signify the people's quest for a post-colonial selfhood that paradoxically recognises, as part of an incomplete project of post-modernity, its own instability and its derivative and intertextual nature. To arrive at this, however, readers must first wade through four pages of isolated detailed discussion of Emha Ainun Nadjib's 1994 novel *Gerakan punakawan atawa arus bawah* (The clown

servant movement or the undertow) before they begin to realise that this is just one example of a sub-genre in contemporary fiction which is, additionally, related to the humorous *wayang mbeling* columns which appear in the Sunday newspapers. The essay's sub-title, too, proclaims it as a study of Emha's novel when what is at stake is an entire corpus of texts.

Apart from these little hiccups, this book will take the student of post-colonial studies well beyond metropolitan favourites such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer to, quite literally, the inner reaches of Indonesian literature, including works produced outside Jakarta (*sastra pedalaman*) as well as less well-known publications from the colonial era. Doris Jedamski's essay on colonial Indonesian transformations of Western bourgeois literary figures such as Robinson Crusoe and Sherlock Holmes into anti-colonial heroes is wittily executed, while Michael Bodden's study of post-modernist theatre and fiction is savvy in its articulation of Western cultural theory with Indonesian politics. Melani Budianta usefully discusses TV's commodification of racial and ethnic identities, although her moves to read Indonesia's cultural engagement with capitalism from the 1930s to 1990s through the development of a literary figure, Si Doel, from a marginal colonial child hero to a national TV hero are inspired but sometimes farfetched. Barbara Hatley's essay, meanwhile, does for twentieth-century Indonesian women's literature what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar did for their nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon counterparts in *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). Hatley reads local men's texts as *pre-text* in order to identify the framework of male pressures and anxieties about women, sex, modernity and Westernisation within which Indonesian women wrote, thereby paving the way for more symptomatic reading of their textual ambivalences, buried subtexts and strategic silences.

Given Indonesia's unique cultural and political location in Southeast Asia and its non-British colonial legacy, this book begins to point to an urgency in making more Indonesian texts available in English. This development could prove productive in extending current theorising of postcolonial and postmodern subject formations, especially with regard to the region.

MATILDA GABRIELPILLAI

National Institute of Education, Singapore

Malaysia

A decade in Borneo

By ADA PRYER. Edited by SUSAN MORGAN

London: Leicester University Press, 2001. Pp. 183. Plates, Note, Bibliography, Index.

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A decade in Borneo was first published in an East Asian edition in 1893 and in London in 1894. It is clear from her letters to friends that Ada Pryer was far from pleased with the first edition and even before the London printing appeared had started to work on an enlarged second edition. Although this second edition never materialised, her corrections and additions did survive and the latter were published separately, with parts

of her diaries, in 1989 (*Mrs Pryer in Sabah: Diaries and papers from the late nineteenth century*, ed. Nicholas Tarling [Auckland: University of Auckland Centre for Asian Studies, 1989]). The present volume is a reprint of the London first edition, and while certainly welcome, does not contain the later additions. This is regrettable, as the latter material adds much of interest, including a substantial chapter on the 'Dusuns or Ida'ans' and a good deal more on William Pryer's first five years in Sabah before his marriage to Ada. Once again Ada Pryer, it seems, has been ill-served by publishers.

Remembered today as the founder of modern Sandakan, William Pryer was a significant figure in the colonial history of Sabah. He accompanied Baron Overbeck when the latter negotiated leases for what is now Sabah from the sultans of Sulu and Brunei and was immediately afterwards put ashore in Sandakan Bay on 11 February 1878, at the site of what was then a small gun-running settlement known as Kampung German, named for the nationality of at least some of its transient traders. Given the title of 'Resident of the East Coast', he was provided by what soon became the British North Borneo Chartered Company with an 'administrative staff' of two Eurasian assistants and a West Indian servant. That he survived his first years in Borneo at all is something of a miracle.

Unfortunately, the editor of this reprint, an American professor of English, has little apparent knowledge of Sabah or its history. Even the cover illustration – a painting of riverside vegetation in Sarawak – has nothing in particular to do with Sabah, nor do most of the other illustrations in the book. Seemingly, for this editor any scene of colonial Borneo would have sufficed. In the same vein, she begins her introduction with a chronologically mismatched comparison of William Pryer and James Brooke. As she sees it, in the 'mythologized public rhetoric' that she asserts drove British popular acceptance of imperialistic policy, Pryer supplied 'an appealing alternative of colonial enterprise to the aggressive adventure image' offered by Brooke, particularly when presented as here in the form of a 'feminized narrative'. That Ada Pryer's slender volume should figure in grand rhetorical projects to promote imperialism and undermine the 'mythic' appeal of the first 'White Rajah' seems hardly credible given the book's late publication date and its modest nature.

Worse still, this view distracts from what are the volume's genuine virtues. By the time William Pryer arrived in Sabah, James Brooke's long reign was already over. His nephew Charles had been Rajah of Sarawak for a full ten years, and by the time *A decade in Borneo* appeared 15 years later, Charles was deeply engaged in the prosaic task of creating a recognisable administrative system that, whatever its limitations, would prove far more effective than anything that the Chartered Company would ever succeed in establishing in Sabah. Indeed, it is not clear that the editor herself is entirely aware of the difference between James and Charles Brooke. Thus, rather off-handedly, she writes, 'James himself never married, though he appears to have had sexual relationships with Malay and tribal women' (p. 5). While the former may be true of James, the latter certainly is not, though it does apply to his nephew.

The editor, in this connection, makes gender the principal lens through which she assesses the significance of *A decade in Borneo*. Without doubt, considerations of gender have added a wealth of insight to historical studies, notably including those of recent Southeast Asian colonial history. Here, however, her treatment of the subject resembles caricature more than analysis. Thus, she tells us that as a 'feminine narrator', Ada Pryer 'radically modifie[d] the masculinized iconography familiar to her imperial readers'

(p. 20). Dominating this iconography was the first White Rajah of Sarawak, James Brooke, who, she tells us, achieved ‘mythic significance in Victorian imperial discourse’ as a romantic and ‘aggressively masculine hero’, an archetypal fantasy of an isolated white man ruling over savages. This fantasy, she continues, was ‘at its best in boys’ adventure stories’. In these tales, meant to ‘fulfill the dreams of English schoolboys’, Sarawak was ‘masculinized’. ‘[T]here was no place for women’, but instead the hero’s masculinity was ‘demonstrated by dashing through the jungle with weapons and waging battles’ (p. 19).

Inconveniently for this line of argument, the first author to express in print an idea of James Brooke as a ‘romantic model’ for English school children was, in fact, another ‘feminine narrator’, Harriette McDougall, whose *Letters from Sarawak, addressed to a child* (London: Grant and Griffith, 1854) was in many ways the Sarawak precursor of Ada’s own book. Moreover, McDougall’s James Brooke bore little resemblance to the much later adventure-story heroes described by Morgan. Nor, for that matter, did James Brooke in life much resemble the editor’s portrayal of him. In this connection, she seems totally unaware of the controversy that surrounds the question of his sexuality. Despite a veritable publishing industry devoted to dissecting his character, Brooke remains in many ways an enigmatic figure. Whatever the ambiguities, however, it is clear, as John Walker has noted, that his most intense emotional ties were with young men: officers in his service, midshipmen and, in the final years of his life, English colliery lads. (See John H. Walker, ‘“This peculiar acuteness of feeling”: James Brooke and the enactment of desire’, *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 29 (1998): 148–89.) His masculinity, in short, was far more complex than anything Morgan imagines.

The editor argues that in *A decade in Borneo*, by contrast, William Pryer is ‘portrayed’ by his wife ‘as an amicable arranger. . . more feminine than masculine’. His Malay allies are full of ‘feminized sensitivity and charm’, and his colonising project aimed at nothing less than banishing a violent ‘masculine past’ and replacing it with ‘a new feminized present’ (p. 20). That William skillfully managed to gain the grudging support of contending local leaders, many of them at serious odds with one another, hardly diminishes his masculinity. In any event, he had little choice given the scant support provided by the Company. Moreover, one can only imagine how scandalised Ada would have been by the suggestion that her husband was anything but a paragon of manliness. She plainly adored William, and one of the great charms of her memoir is the loving portrait she presents of her husband, whose projects she keenly championed.

Finally, Morgan makes much of the differing *raisons d’être* advanced by the British North Borneo Chartered Company and the Brookes to justify their respective rule. Whereas the Brookes claimed for themselves the role of protecting native interests against European capital (and also, of course, against possible challenge to their rule from European investors), the Company advocated open access by foreign capital to local markets, resources and labour—a position very much like that advanced today by proponents of ‘globalisation’. Like the latter, promised benefits proved largely illusory, and neither regime was particularly successful in financial terms. In Sarawak, however, at least some heed was paid to indigenous sentiments; this was not the case in Sabah, and the Company’s insensitivity soon opened a rift between William and its directors.

William Pryer, it should be noted, was not the first Englishman on the scene in Sabah. By the end of the 1870s, Britain already had had a long if dissolute history of engagement in northern Borneo. Starting with the Balambangan debacle in 1773, there

followed a century of gun-running and private contraband trade. William Crocker, the Governor of North Borneo in Pryer's time, had himself been actively involved in this trade, most of it with the nearby Sulu Sultanate. Aside from cloth, the principal items traded were opium, guns and munitions. The latter fed directly into what was then, and had been for over a century, a flourishing regional commerce in slaves, coastal raiding and piracy. Private British traders were deeply implicated and played no small part in the corresponding rise of the Sulu Sultanate to a position of regional dominance. However, on the delicate issue of piracy, from at least Stamford Raffles' time onward, the principal British argument had been that it was not 'free trade', but rather restrictions on trade imposed by Britain's European rivals that caused the power of indigenous states to decline, and hence allowed for the rise of piracy.

Ada Pryer opens *A decade in Borneo* with a fanciful version of this argument applied to nineteenth-century Sabah. Thus, she writes, a bountiful era preceded the first appearance of Europeans. The countryside was tranquil and well-populated, and agriculture and trade flourished under a strong but 'passable order' imposed by native sultans and rajas. All of this abruptly changed with the coming of Europeans – not British, of course – but Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch. Due to European meddling in neighbouring waters, local authority gave way to misrule and chaos. 'All the powers of evil seemed let loose to do their worst' (p. 38); and while pirates swept the Borneo coast, inland 'Dayaks, now unrestrained, indulged their passion for head-hunting' (p. 39). Nothing remained but for the Company to arrive, subdue the pirates and re-impose harmony and order. Here is clearly a case of mythologising. It is not one, however, of which the editor takes much notice, due no doubt to the fact that her principal sources are Anglocentric historians who in one way or another largely embrace this argument, although in more sophisticated forms.

William Pryer was virtually alone among Company officers to have lived in the Philippines before coming to Sabah. This experience seems to have served him well, and in his own sparse writings he showed genuine insight into the complex, factious politics characteristic of the polyglot population he encountered on the East Coast of Sabah. He also displayed rare sympathy for Tausug, Bugis, Malay, Arab and Bajau leaders, counting the latter in particular among his earliest allies. While he advocated 'modern commerce', it was in fact old-fashioned indigenous trade that paid the bills, and *A decade in Borneo* is a useful source of information on the latter, including rattan and bird's nest collection. Ada describes nest collecting at Segalung and Madai Caves and writes of journeys upriver to visit trading stations in the company of William, including a trip up the Kinabatangan River. Here, there is little 'femininity' on display, but rather incessant shooting of wild game – deer, boars and even rhinoceros. There are also the familiar stereotypes of the times – 'slothful' natives (p. 98), for example – but by and large Ada, like William, is a sympathetic observer.

The editor is correct in stressing the Pryers' enthusiasm for what they saw as the commercial prospects of Sabah. Quite clearly, the aim of Ada's little book was to make North Borneo better known to a metropolitan public and to attract investors. What Morgan's analysis misses in the book is the undercurrent of criticism directed towards the Company government for its short-sightedness and inability to respond to local events short of rebellions. Troubles were already afoot in Sabah and growing local bitterness could not have escaped the Pryers' notice. By this time, William's own career

had been side-tracked and well before Ada's book was completed, he had resigned from the Company's service. In reading *A decade in Borneo*, it is important to bear in mind that the largest and most damaging rebellion – what came to be known as the 'Mat Salleh Uprising' – was on the verge of breaking out when the book first appeared.

By the time Ada's book was published, William was no longer a Company officer, but, as she relates, was managing several commercial plantations in the vicinity of Sandakan. Undercapitalised, these soon failed and in declining health, William left Sabah with Ada in October 1898, less than five years after the publication of *A decade in Borneo*. Neither would ever see Borneo again: William died and was buried at sea near Port Said, while Ada continued on to England. Here, she lived out the final years of her life as a widow near her parents' home at Newport. Later, the Company rule that William Pryer had helped to establish would come to an end with the Japanese Occupation of Sabah, and the Pryers' beloved Sandakan would achieve tragic notoriety and be remembered thereafter as the site of perhaps the most infamous of all Japanese POW camps. The plantation agriculture they had championed would come into its own with a vengeance in post-colonial Sabah, with social and environmental consequences they would, in their innocence, never have imagined.

CLIFFORD SATHER

University of Helsinki

Chinese business in the making of a Malay state, 1882–1941: Kedah and Penang

By WU XIAO AN

London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp 239. Index, Bibliography, Illustrations.

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This book examines the shifting fortunes of Chinese business enterprise and its networks in the Malay state of Kedah. Wu Xiao An has focused primarily on the rice trade and the opium revenue farming business, choosing the period from 1880 to 1909 to show the rise and fall of Chinese businesses in the revenue farming system in that state. He also describes Kedah's peculiar relationship to the British colony of Penang and its Siamese overlord. Economically, it was tied to Penang and its economy was dominated by Chinese merchants based there. On the other hand, while the British had political interests and exercised influence there, the Siamese were Kedah's political masters until the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909.

Unwilling to leave the story in mid-course, Wu continues it with an account of the ways in which these relationships changed when Britain took full control of Kedah. One major change was in the treatment of Chinese who were British subjects. Under the old regime, the British Consul was quite willing to bully the Malay government into yielding to the demands – sometimes quite unreasonable – of Chinese British subjects. When Kedah was taken from Siam and became a British territory, things changed; the Chinese were now treated as competitors to British enterprise and lost many of their former advantages. The British also cancelled the revenue farming monopolies which had been the mainstay of the wealthy Chinese. As they were pushed out of the lucrative revenue farming business, wealthy Kedah Chinese and their compatriots in Penang, who had

grown wealthy doing business in Kedah, turned to rice milling, rubber planting and other enterprises. The farming system was ended in Malaya in 1910, and the same families which had held the revenue farms now came to dominate the rice milling business through the Rice Combine and other such associations.

Although the book is specifically about Chinese business, Wu has taken pains to show the complex interplay between the Chinese businessmen, the Kedah sultan and his officials, the colonial government in Penang and the Siamese government. His study shows the constantly shifting pattern of alliances and opposition among the various groups as they manoeuvred for position and power in their various economic and political relationships. He analyses the Chinese presence from a multi-dimensional and highly textured view, noting that 'Chinese business networks and power relationships are not simple, isolated business or communal matters, but involve larger political, socio-economic and historical processes' (p. 181). Throughout the book, Wu stresses the importance of region, family and state in his analysis:

My research findings contrast with and contradict several classic but one-faceted images of the Chinese diaspora in the current literature that see the Chinese as the 'middle-man' in colonial society; or as an immigrant community 'marginalized' in relations to a dominant society; or as a 'bamboo network' of international business defined by 'Chineseness'. All these images compartmentalize the Chinese, implying fixed boundaries and static structures, underestimating interactions with the host government, society and economy of the countries in which they were residents. They imply that all Chinese are simply and irrevocably 'Chinese' tending to exaggerate their transnational networks, social isolation and sojourning mentality. (pp. 181–2)

The book is thus much broader than the simple story of Chinese business in Kedah. Wu focuses on the 'Southeast Asian transformation': Kedah's transition from a tropical agrarian society with a limited but active trade into a colonial commercial and capitalist society with a large influx of immigrant labour which engulfed and marginalised the indigenous peasantry. This was the same path followed by most of the countries of Southeast Asia, and most of them also found that much of the process was driven by Chinese immigrants. Thus, his comments and his findings can be applied across the wider region.

Wu has also helped to broaden our understanding of the unique nature of the colonial economies of Southeast Asia. Most economic studies of colonial Malaya, for instance, have been focused on rubber and tin. Wu, in contrast, has concentrated on rice and opium, which he describes as the two main means of sustaining labour. The labour force was, after all, the mainstay of colonial production and, moreover, it was a major market of consumption. While the Chinese ultimately lost the revenue farming income, they managed to keep in their hands the retail economy and the infrastructure that fed consumption.

The book is a published version of Wu's doctoral dissertation done at the University of Amsterdam. He is from the People's Republic of China and has held positions at Xiamen University, the National University of Singapore and Kyoto University, as well as his current position at Beijing University. He is among the first PRC scholars to publish a major study on the Southeast Asian Chinese in English. His research is exceptional, given his command of English, Chinese and Malay sources. He has made the most extensive

use of English-language materials, which are the most abundant; the work is nevertheless one of the most wide-ranging and detailed studies of the development of a colonised Malay state on record. While Wu has generally presented his account as a chronological narrative, he has done it through the examination of several case studies. Specifically, he has looked at the careers of Lim Leng Cheak and his son Lim Eow Hong, Choong Cheng Kean and his sons Choong Lye Hock and Choong Lye Hin, Tan Ah Yu, Che Ariffin, Wan Ahmad, Lim Cheng Teik and Chong Sin Yew, among others. He has also carried the story over two and sometimes three generations, giving us a picture of the changing fortunes of these families and of their various survival strategies.

The book is a major contribution to studies of nineteenth and twentieth century Malaysian history, studies of the overseas Chinese and studies of colonialism and it should be seen as an important complement to other works which show the role played by Penang in its neighbouring territories, such as Jennifer Cushman's work on the Khaw family (*Family and state: The formation of a Sino-Thai tin-mining dynasty, 1797–1932* [Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991]).

CARL TROCKI

Queensland University of Technology

The Philippines

Barons, brokers, and buyers: The institutions and cultures of Philippine sugar

By MICHAEL S. BILLIG

Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003. Pp. xiv, 320. Map, Notes, Bibliography, Index. DOI: 10.1017/S0022463404280274

Sugar was practically nonexistent in the Philippine Archipelago prior to the sixteenth century. Introduced as an import from China in the seventeenth century, it achieved a luxury crop status a century afterward. In the nineteenth century, the Philippine sugar industry (PSI) emerged to satisfy the unanswered demand for sugar in Europe; in no time, PSI became an export champion and a pivotal economic entity. The twentieth century witnessed a sluggish PSI hardly involved with product diversification or widening its export market. Chronically short of labour and innovative capabilities, PSI could barely sustain its industrial productivity and competitiveness. PSI consoled itself merely with the surge of domestic sugar consumption whereto most of its production was channelled. The complex dynamics of social, political and economic institutions and arrangements in the country customised the decline of PSI. Michael S. Billig fleshes out arguments for this process with evidential and supporting claims in his *Barons, brokers, and buyers: The institutions and cultures of Philippine sugar*.

That unproductivity, inefficiency and non-competitiveness are recent developments in PSI is an understatement; these problems hounded the industry from the outset. Investors and the Spanish colonial government did little to chart PSI development and were silent regarding its long-term growth. Consequently, PSI became irresistably attractive to profit-seekers. Its formless expansion encouraged indiscriminate movement and utilisation of factors, and capital flew into PSI from the struggling textile industry. Sugar *hacenderos* (landed elites) rose to prominence, usurping crop lands owned by small

farmers and inevitably consolidating them into sugar *haciendas* (vast tracts of land). The Spanish colonial government legitimated *hacienda* abuses in the hope of sustaining PSI trade dominance and productivity.

Observed changes in PSI allowed for *hacienda* power structuring. In the *haciendas* where dislocated farmers and rural migrants worked and resided, *hacenderos* acted as traditional patriarchs controlling internal decision-making. They provided their workers with relief and financial assistance with tied conditionalities and institutionalised payment mechanisms (sharecropping, fixed-wage rate and the *samacan* contract) which furthered a state of dependency among the labor force. *Hacenderos* effectively amassed wealth and captive supporters, becoming an influential political bloc. Protectively nurtured by Spain, *hacenderos* behaved non-competitively in the years that followed. They sought rents, log-rolled and used their political leverage to insulate PSI from competition and from the self-sufficiency demands of Filipino nationalists, especially during the American Occupation, at times causing chaotic interludes in Philippine politics and economy.

The entry of central millers and sugar traders made the once impervious PSI structurally trichotomous and segmented. Traditional *hacenderos* asserted their dominance as planters, competing with central millers for the limited supply of, and property rights over, sugar. The lack of cooperation between the two groups stifled plans for PSI development. Sugar traders competed with millers for cheaper sugar distribution, and with *hacenderos* for control over central mills and industry resources. The traders, mostly of Chinese descent and foreign to the PSI environment, emerged as a new but strong industry power bloc.

The nebulous commitment of post-independence Philippine governments has likewise impaired PSI development. Managing institutions like the Sugar Regulatory Administration tolerate the sugar industry sectors (SIS) with respect to their parochial and inefficient utilisation of support mechanisms for PSI (e.g., *quedan*, sugar categorisation and subsidies). Government officials, in turn, capitalise on the weaknesses of these established institutions and mechanisms to solidate their political alliances with SIS.

The book contains important insights. First, unfavourable situations create vicissitudes awaiting meaningful exploitation. The decline of PSI effectively diffused the power of traditional sugar *hacenderos*, and redirected the interests of the younger members of this group to profitable urban-based economic activities. A reconfiguration of *hacienda* power relations ensued, allowing for growing activism among the *hacienda* workforce. Second, the distorted nature of the sugar industry renders impotent any attempts to rationalise it. Rent-seeking, political opportunism and other aberrant responses have their non-structural entry points, e.g., the values system of PSI sectors.

Billig concludes that a cultural dichotomy of the SIS underlies the current state of PSI, but his chosen methodology does little to support his thesis. The ethnographic accounts used appear to have merely given more space for airing sentiments and grievances from the SIS rather than substantiating indications of cultural dichotomy. Instead of inferences, generalisations are formed from untriangulated ethnographic accounts, barely supported by quantified and empirically verifiable claims; such weaknesses are particularly prevalent in Chapter 3. Also, the discussions are heavy on the supply side. Little attention is paid to the nature of participation and changing roles of end-consumers of sugar to explain the present state of the industry, and the derived

demand for sugar is only briefly discussed. Cultural dichotomy is essentially presented as a catalyst for the decline of PSI, but the reasons for it are scarcely demonstrated. Given the discussions, one may argue instead for the ahistorical beginnings and context-free development of PSI.

LIBERTY IBANEZ NOLASCO

University of the Philippines, Manila

Thailand

Lords of things: The fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's modern image

By MAURIZIO PELEGGI

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Historians of Thailand have long been interested in the transformations that occurred in the economic, administrative, and educational spheres at the turn of the twentieth century under the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910). Dressed up in modernisation theory, a dominant royalist historical narrative has represented these reforms as embodying the endeavours whereby a non-colonial royal elite modernised Siam and thereby safeguarded the country's independence. In recent years, revisionist readings of this part of Thailand's history have seriously challenged this master narrative. For example, Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul took this mantra to task in *Siam mapped* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994) by examining changing perceptions of space and the formation of modern Siam as a geopolitical entity as national construction.

In this stimulating and very readable book Maurizio Peleggi offers a revisionist interpretation of the fashioning of the Siamese monarchy's public image as a modern, civilised and civilising institution during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. Peleggi argues convincingly that this transformation of the royal elite's public image was not solely a sequel of the modernising reforms undertaken in the economic and administrative spheres – a view which constitutes the orthodoxy of the royalist narrative. Instead, he sees this transformation as part of a larger process whereby the royal elite asserted their civilised status in a globalised arena – both in relation to being 'natural leaders' of the country, in terms of their self-esteem, and to the outside world.

The royal elite in Siam had previously framed their public image and social identity with reference to Indian and Chinese influences. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, a new situation developed as these traditional forms of cultural and symbolic capital were overshadowed by the dominant position of the Western countries and their cultural and civilisational pull. Consequently, the monarchy began remaking its public image in conformance to Western ideals. This involved the appropriation of Western patterns of consumption and display: from being 'Lords of Life' the royal elite was also to become 'Lords of Things'. Peleggi illuminates this process through a well-documented analysis of three themes which structure the book.

In the first part of his study, he introduces the reader to the novel practices associated with the Thai monarchy at the turn of the twentieth century. These include

new modes of prestige expenditure, the collection of Western paintings, changing bodily and clothing practices incorporating Western and local styles to form a distinct style, and finally the adoption of photography as a medium reflecting modernity in its form while at the same time displaying a modern image of the royal elite in its modern sartorial ways. In the second part, Peleggi turns his attention to changes related to space. Here he links the refashioning of the monarchy's image with the move of the residential quarters from the Grand Palace to Dusit Park. Not only did this move open up a more comfortable and pleasurable private space for the royal elite, he suggests, but with its fenced villas and rectilinear streets Dusit Park also signalled the royalty's attachment to the civilisational sphere of the West. Similarly, the same link to a Western civilisational space is expressed in relation to public space in two landmarks of the open area at the end of the Rachadamnoen Avenue. One is the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall, which was planned to become the monarchy's first representative building in entirely Western style. The other is the equestrian statue of King Chulalongkorn, the horse being alien to the local iconography of royalist authority. Finally, in the third part, Peleggi looks at the novel spectacles employed to convey the new image of the Siamese monarchy to Thai and foreign audiences.

With this book Peleggi highlights hitherto neglected dimensions of the modernisation of the Siamese monarchy at the turn of the twentieth century and it is a major contribution to the study of Thailand's history. He builds upon the ideas of O. W. Wolters about localisation and a central tenet of his analysis is to depict the social construction of modernity and the refashioning of the monarchy's public image as a creative process of selection, adoption and adaptation, and not as a one-way process deriving from the West. Therefore, in addition to being of immediate relevance for readers interested in Thailand's history, Peleggi's book can also be recommended reading for a much wider group of readers – those interested in the historical aspects of globalisation and cultural flows.

SØREN IVARSSON
University of Copenhagen

Vietnam

Viêt-Nam exposé: French scholarship on twentieth-century Vietnamese society

Edited by GISÈLE L. BOUSQUET and PIERRE BROCHEUX

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Pp 476. Footnotes. Index.

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This volume contains a wide-ranging collection of articles by members of the French scholarly community, most of them translated from French. As Gisèle Bousquet notes in her Introduction, 'this project [the book] is intended both to introduce new scholarship in Vietnamese studies and to initiate a forum of exchange between anglophones and francophones that will bridge [the] gap' caused by 'cultural and political differences' between the two groups and by the fact that most French scholarship is not available in English (p. 1). It can be argued that Bousquet somewhat underestimates her Anglo-Saxon colleagues, since reading ability in French is still a requirement for any

serious student of Vietnam, but the translation project is well-intentioned, and it is certainly true that a book published in English by an American academic press will reach a wider audience than scholarship published in France.

The book is divided into three parts: 'Vietnamese society in the early twentieth century', 'Vietnamese intellectuals: Contesting colonial power', and 'Postcolonial Vietnam: From a welfare state to a market-oriented economy'. The first section is anchored by three solid pieces from scholars connected to the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), the pre-eminent colonial-era research institution whose return to Hanoi has significantly stimulated the field of Vietnamese studies in France. A number of its researchers have delved into local archives from northern Vietnam during the colonial period, and perhaps the most important contribution of this book is to make available in English some of the fruits of their labour. Philippe Papin provides an interesting micro-study of local leadership, in particular the important role of the village head (*lý trưởng*), who has traditionally been overshadowed by the Council of Notables in most studies of village power holders. Philippe Le Failler focuses on the first half-decade of the twentieth century, looking at the actions of French Customs officials when they swooped down on villages to investigate illegal activities and at the often-violent reactions of the local inhabitants. Finally, Emmanuel Poisson examines the practice of *hậu bổ* (here, a kind of administrative internship for new mandarins) in the early years of the French protectorate in Tonkin. While the three chapters are somewhat dense, packed as they are with names and dates and terms, they reflect long hours of painstaking work in the archives and offer considerable insight into the interaction between the colonial administration and indigenous political institutions in Tonkin.

The other two contributions to this section are more dubious. Nguyen Van Ky's chapter on 'Rethinking the status of women in folklore and oral history' is entertaining but rather insubstantial. It jumps around from topic to topic, with an anecdotal approach relying heavily on a few proverbs and a considerable amount of speculation. Only four pages of the chapter actually talk about twentieth-century Vietnamese society – the sub-title of the book – and the discussion of 'Modernity and women's quest for equal rights' is considerably more superficial than, say, the section on women in David Marr's *Vietnamese tradition on trial 1925–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). The contribution by Laurence Monnais-Rousselot on the colonial health system goes to the opposite extreme. Based on the author's doctoral dissertation, it gives a very detailed quantitative account with numbers of hospital beds, patients, millions of piastres spent in a given year, etc. The problem is that despite a footnote with an extensive list of books on issues relating to colonial health and science, the author fails to engage any of this literature or to problematise the quality and accessibility of the services she describes in Indochina.

The articles in the second section are a more effective balance of readability and scholarship. Agathe Larcher-Goscha offers a nice chapter on the early years of Cùờng Đê, the Nguyễn prince from a rival branch of the family which had been bypassed in 1820 in favour of Emperor Minh Mạng and his successors, who held the throne until the dynasty came to an end in 1945. Cùờng Đê is a well-known figure in the narrative of Vietnamese nationalism, but he is usually overshadowed by Phan Bội Châu, with whom he was associated for a number of years, or else by the activities of the Japanese who were his patrons for much of his life. Larcher-Goscha does an excellent job of teasing out the

complexities of his relationship with Châu and of showing that the prince did in fact have his own separate agenda which did not always overlap with that of his prominent collaborator. Phan Thi Minh Le also provides an interesting study of a prominent nationalist, the editor and political figure Huỳnh Thúc Khang, who was somewhere between a collaborator and a revolutionary and generally receives less scholarly attention than those of his compatriots who fit neatly into one category or another.

Trinh Van Thao has a chapter on the '1925 generation of Vietnamese intellectuals' which builds on his previous work, *L'école française en Indochine* (Paris: Kartala, 1995) and *Viet Nam du confucianisme au communisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1990). Not everyone will enjoy his sociological approach to history, particularly the heavy reliance on jargon, but Thao does know his subjects, and his synthesis of their biographical data is effective. Perhaps the most novel of the four pieces in this section, however, is the chapter by Tran Thi Lien on Henriette Bui, the first Vietnamese woman to receive a medical degree in France. Lien's piece relies mainly on interviews with her subject and the result is fascinating reading. The chapter is especially effective as a 'reality check' after reading Monnais-Rousselot's rather lyrical description of the health care available to the Vietnamese. Bui does not mince words when reminiscing about the facilities she had to work in and the generally degrading treatment she received at the hands of often less qualified French colleagues. Lien's study also provides some insight into the character of Bui's father, the prominent collaborator Bùi Quang Chiêu.

The final section, as its title suggests, concentrates heavily on socio-economic issues. Pierre Brocheux contributes an interesting chapter on 'the economy of war' between 1945–54, a period about which scholars outside Vietnam have written far too little. His insightful conclusion is that 'the anti-French resistance's economy clearly demonstrated the limits of an inward-looking economy and the pipe dream of an independent economy' (p. 326) and served, to some extent, to keep Vietnamese planners from sliding completely into Stalinism. His chapter on the First Indochina War, when the Party's control over the economy was incomplete, serves as an effective introduction to Florence Yvon-Tran's study of collectivization in the DRV and SRV during the time when that control was much stronger. Bluntly entitled 'The chronicle of a failure', her overview of the waxing and waning of this linchpin of 'socialist agriculture' does not break new ground (no pun intended) *vis-à-vis* the scholarship of Adam Fforde, Benedict Kerkvliet and others, but it is an interesting and readable overview based mainly on published and unpublished documents from Vietnam. Xavier Oudin's chapter on labour restructuring, like Yvon-Tran's contribution, also takes a longer-term view which spans both the waxing and waning of the socialist economy. Pascal Bergeret, writing on 'agro-commodity chains', and Olivier Tessier, with a case study of rural-urban migration, do not offer any dramatic conclusions but offer useful micro-studies of specific aspects of the *đi mới* economy.

The final chapter, which looks at Vietnam through a very different lens from the rest of the section – and, indeed, from the rest of the book – is Bousquet's 'Facing globalization: Vietnam and the Francophone Community'. She traces in considerable detail the country's relations with the French-speaking world over the last two decades or so, notably the government's sporadic and rather tortuous efforts to make Vietnam into a *pays francophone*. As Bousquet notes somewhat ruefully, these efforts have borne little fruit,

particularly among the younger generation. Vietnamese students will cheerfully tell you that they are a 'pragmatic' (*thực tế*) bunch, and French barely registers on their intellectual radar screen in terms of usefulness and employability. The present obsession with English is arguably to some extent a step backward from the socialist era, when the dispersion of Vietnamese students among various fraternal countries (including China) at least ensured a healthy variety of language skills. At present the number of Vietnamese under, say, the age of thirty who are fluent in a language other than English is shrinking drastically. As Bousquet points out, 'the Vietnamese people are active participants in the global economy, the matrix of which is English speaking' (p. 450).

Bousquet's Introduction notes that 'we present here an "*esquisse*" of twentieth-century Vietnamese society' (p. 6), but the 'sketch' provided by these contributions is, well, sketchy. They offer a number of 'micro' level studies on fairly specific topics, but there is little to knit them together into a broader picture of either colonial or post-colonial Vietnamese society. Moreover, the chapters are of uneven quality and value. Most readers will find at least several subjects of interest, but probably not many will want to wade through all of them and may be content to settle for the summaries provided in the Introduction. Having said that, however, I recognise the usefulness of compiling such a volume in order to provide exposure to a new generation of French *viêtnamisants* among a wider, English-speaking audience.

BRUCE M. LOCKHART
National University of Singapore